

## Clinical Sociology Review

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Volume 14 | Issue 1

Article 19

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1-1-1996

# The Chronic Crisis in Psychological Measurement and Assessment: A Historical Survey

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### Recommended Citation

Kaplan, Mitchell A. (1996) "The Chronic Crisis in Psychological Measurement and Assessment: A Historical Survey," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 14: Iss. 1, Article 19.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol14/iss1/19>

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**The Chronic Crisis in Psychological Measurement and Assessment: A Historical Survey**, by Scott T. Meier. San Diego, California: AP Professional, A Division of Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994. 290pp. \$54.95 cloth. ISBN 0-12-488440-7.

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Scott T. Meier has written an excellent nontraditional book that traces the development of the field of psychological testing and assessment from a sociohistorical perspective. The book is organized into eight chapters, each dealing with a different aspect of the psychological measurement and assessment controversy.

In Chapter One Meier gives readers a general overview of the theoretical foundations that underlie the various statistical measures that psychologists (and others) may utilize to predict test reliability and validity.

Chapter Two explores the historical controversies surrounding issues associated with the development of universal psychological testing strategies designed to measure behavioral characteristics that are common to all human beings in society. Meier contends that a review of research conducted by psychologists over the last several decades clearly indicates that systematic response errors in self-report testing situations are caused by inconsistencies in how individuals respond to those situations. Meier posits that the categorization of systematic response errors are strongly linked to the item response strategies that individuals use when they take psychological tests. There are cognitive, affective, motivational, behavioral, and environmental factors that play an important role in influencing the behavioral reactions of individuals to the testing situations to which they are exposed.

In the closing section of this chapter Meier argues that the degree of match between the testing instrument and the test taker's cognitive, affective, and behavioral states and traits are strongly related to the generative response strategies that individuals utilize in testing situations. The greater the number and degree of behavioral, affective, cognitive mismatches between the test instrument and test taker traits, the greater will be the utilization of individual response strategies which tends to lower the overall face validity and reliability of the testing instrument (pp. 68-69).

Chapter Three examines the issue of consistency of psychological measurement as it is applied to employment and clinical interview situations. Meier argues that psychological information that is collected in clinical interview situations is highly susceptible to rater bias. A review of the research findings documented in the historical literature on rater bias by the author revealed that practitioners often make clinical judgments about the behavior of their clients that are not correct. Meier contends, that rater observations of client test performance are often influenced by psychosocial variables such as social stereotypes, supervisor appraisals of job performance, and level of psychological stress which are all human factors that are not directly related to the predictive objectivity of the testing process.

In the closing section of this chapter Meier posits, that individual self reports and all other clinical rating systems used by psychologists to measure human test performance are subject to similar problems of systematic error which are related to the formation of rater impressions of the ratee (p. 89). Clinical raters and self reporters often fail to take into account the full range of available information about the human characteristics they observe in both clinical and scientific testing situations. He therefore recommends that raters receive more intensified professional training in the behavioral assessment procedures that would allow them to make more concrete and valid judgements about the clinical and empirical phenomena they analyze.

In Chapter Four Meier turns reader's attention to an empirical discussion of one of the most important controversies in the field of psychological measurement and assessment: *The Trait versus State debate*. The core of the controversy in this debate, according to the author, is whether consistency of human performance across testing situations is caused by long-standing personality traits which are stable or by internal psychological variables such as human motivation that may be reinforced by external factors in the testing environment. A review of the findings of studies conducted by researchers over the last two decades, found that both of these factors play a critical role in shaping the level of performance that an individual will exhibit in specific testing situations. Later in the chapter Meier discusses how these concepts may be applied to the assessment of a variety of behavioral reinforcement, psycho-therapeutic and vocational counseling modalities used in the treatment of clients.

In Chapter Five Meier examines the historical foundations of the concept of construct validity as it is applied to the field of psychological

measurement. He reviews two of the most important and controversial ideas to emerge from the study of construct validity: convergent and discriminant test validity. These two concepts were first developed by Campbell and Fiske in the 1950's. Their ground-breaking research on construct validity set forth the theoretical and pragmatic foundations for the development of empirical methods for evaluating the construct validity of psychological tests.

In Chapter Six Meier surveys the history of some of the most important existing and innovative approaches utilized by clinical and research psychologists to objectively measure and assess human characteristics. He examines the historical development of current work in the field from five different empirical perspectives: traditional, statistically oriented, cognitive, behavioral assessment, and computer-based approaches. The author discusses the strengths and weaknesses that underlie the theoretical and methodological foundations of each of these approaches as well as their practical application to clinical assessment and intervention situations.

In Chapter Seven Meier reviews the four most important components of the psychological measurement and assessment process: test construction, administration, scoring and interpretation within the context of three major measurement and assessment purpose situations: selection, clinical intervention and theory building.

In Chapter Eight Meier closes out his book with some conclusions and speculations about the overall costs and benefits of the use of psychological tests in decision-making situations. Meier contends that a paradox exists within the psychological community with regard to the true purpose of testing. The core of the paradox centers on the sharp criticisms of psychological measurement by academic psychologists on the one hand, and the widespread use and acceptance of current testing methods and procedures by practitioners on the other. Meier concludes that since research shows that current techniques used in psychological measurement are only applicable to certain decision-making situations and not to others, researchers should devote their professional time and energy to finding new ways to improve the effectiveness of current measurement and assessment modalities.

In sum, the book gives readers a wealth of important information about the many controversial issues and problems that beset the field of psychological measurement and assessment. The statistical information described in each chapter is presented to readers in a concise and understandable manner. I would highly recommend that this book be included

on the reading list of professional psychologists who are developing graduate level courses in the area of psychological measurement and assessment. The book would also make a valuable resource for practitioners working in community-based clinical settings that provide psychological testing services to individuals and families with mental health problems.

**Student Aggression: Prevention, Management, and Replacement Training**, by Arnold P. Goldstein, Berj Harootunian, and Jane Close Conoley. New York: The Guilford Press, 1994. 280 pp., \$28.95 cloth. ISBN 0-89862-246-8.

**School Interventions for Children of Alcoholics**, by Bonnie K. Nastasi and Denise M. DeZolt. New York: The Guilford Press, 1994. x + 275 pp., \$25.00 cloth. ISBN 0-89862-367-7.

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The books under consideration here offer school-based solutions for children of alcoholics and those who are aggressive. They are designed to be implemented by teachers alone or with the assistance of school psychologists.

Nastasi and DeZolt are concerned with helping the children of alcoholics cope with school. The major vehicle for assistance is a K-12 program, called ESCAPE, which is fashioned to facilitate children's ability to develop survival skills. Primary instruments in the program are story telling and cooperative learning.

The rationale for the program is evolved by reviewing theory. The authors opt for a social constructionist view of the world. The influence of family alcoholism on children is explained in terms of an ecological-developmental perspective. This rationale is "supported" by a long and unclear literature review. Small group laboratory results and field experiment results are presented so that it is difficult to distinguish between them. While they report positive outcomes for the methods they propose, they also note that the staying power of the numerous behavioral studies they cite is not of long duration.

There is a thorough presentation of the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program. In addition, there is a good listing of useful audio-visual and bibliographic resources. In short, this is a manual for a specific approach to teaching children coping skills. There is nothing in